

WEAVING NETWORKS 27

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It's small things that can have a big impact on a human life, that's how I was brought up. I was born in the heart of Amsterdam, in a tiny house with a shop. I used to play in the shop, where my parents sold the most beautiful colourful and sparkling things, earrings with purple and diamond-like stones,

colourful scarves, skirts, bright cushion covers with mirrors and even strange-looking wooden puppets. There was always something to discover in the shop and fantasize about. The customers used to come in and out, and I remember that I loved to help them select silver beads to make necklaces and bracelets. My parents are from Delhi, India. Before I was born,

they used to travel together and select the most beautiful objects from India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan. Later, my father went by himself. There was a fixed rhythm: my father travelling to India to work with the Indian craftspeople and my mother running the business from here.



Craftspeople in India often live in villages with nature all around them. They follow the rhythm of nature. During the rainy season between June and September it rains non-stop. It is called monsoon. Children dance and take showers in the rain and everything smells of mud. Many craftspeople can't

do much work during the heavy rains. Printing fabrics is not possible because of the humid weather and the fabrics can't dry. So, if you think about it, these fabrics are directly linked to the weather patterns and the seasons of the year. Even the colours of the prints depend on the weather. Colours become lighter with humid air, and the colours printed in the dry

season between October and March become more intense. The colours are made by mixing plants, roots and leaves, and letting the raw textiles bathe in alkaline water for a while. These colours are so intense, like the indigo from the *Indigofera* plant, that you need to wear long gloves to prevent you from getting blue hands and arms.



From an early age, my parents took me and my sister to India. We visited family, but we also visited many different places. It always feels a bit like a magical circus with people wearing the most colourful clothes. There are animals everywhere, cows, pigs, dogs, monkeys, goats, birds, elephants, camels. There are always many, many people walking, cycling, driving on

rickshaws, by bus, on top of the bus, by train, on top of the train, in trucks, on top of the trucks. The cities make hundreds of sounds and produce all sorts of smells, because everything happens on the street, bathing, cooking, eating, learning, teaching, working, peeing,

sleeping, living. You can even see people make the most beautiful fabrics on the streets by colouring, washing, drying and stitching them. Despite the overwhelming hustle and bustle, everything appears to fit seamlessly into the rhythm of the city. Everything is possible, everything can be made, and everything can be repaired.



If you are born into a family of craftspeople in India, you go to school, but you also learn to make fabrics like your parents. If you are a boy you learn from your father and if you are a girl you learn from your mother. Like in many places all over the world, there was a lockdown. Also, the children of

the craftspeople could not go to school. But they also don't have a laptop to study from. So, the parents and grandparents told their children stories about their history. "Can you imagine that this knowledge is so old, that these beautiful textiles used to be made for kings and queens of India living hundreds of years ago. We can still make these fabrics, and even you can learn to make them." The children

were so excited to learn to make the beautiful textiles: "How. Teach us, we want to learn!" You learn by using your senses; you have to carefully listen to the rhythm of the loom; you have to feel your body move to the rhythm of the chisel and you have to closely watch the rhythm of the pattern being printed.



When I grew older, I visited the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam and saw a brightly coloured children's jacket and a baby cap. I learnt that these clothes were made in India more than 400 years ago. I became so curious that I just had to know more about it. I went to the library to read books, look at images and ask different people many

questions about the textiles, our history and the trade between India and the Netherlands. I discovered that there was a lively trade route between India and the Netherlands in those days. It was a time when Europe was discovering the world outside. Traveling

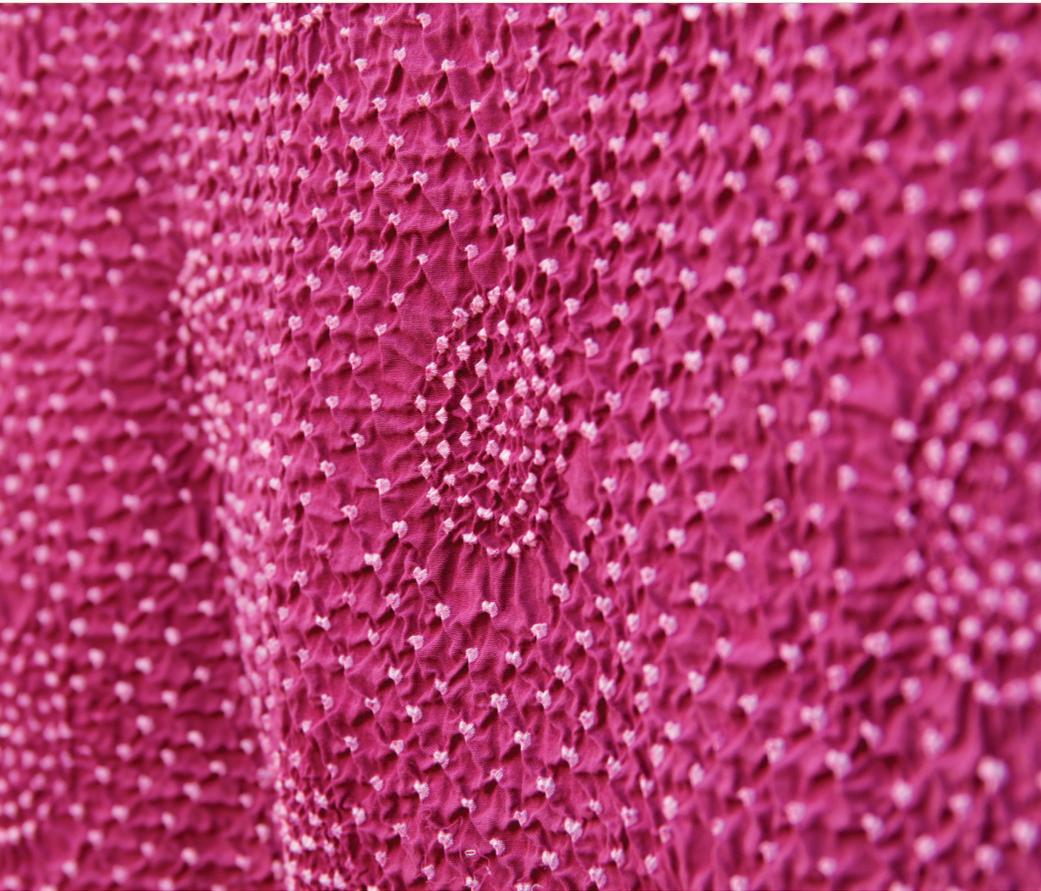
by ship for months at a time, the Europeans found amazing products far away from home. They took textile ideas, designs, drawings and patterns from the Netherlands to India and would return with the products made of cotton and silk, beautiful coloured textiles made with indigo and madder.



Both in India and in the Netherlands, this exchange changed the way people looked at the world. It wasn't only about trading products, this communication also inspired new methods for making textiles, new patterns and images, new ways of learning and communicating, and even

new habits. The Indian textiles became extremely popular in the Netherlands. They were a real fashion hit and people wore them to show off and say that they had bought the most beautiful textiles from faraway countries. They were unique in design with big mysterious looking flowers and beautiful exotic birds and creatures

painted with bamboo pen in the brightest colours. The most exciting news was that the colours in the fabrics did not fade even wash after wash. The Indian craftspeople caused a real innovation in Europe at the time.



Where before, the craftspeople were proud and independent and respected for their skills, four hundred years later the landscape is very different. Most textiles are now made in factories, where people have to work many hours a day for little money. In some countries,

even children work in the textile companies and don't go to school. These factories are also known for how they bring pollution to the regions where they are located. Paint and artificial textiles are chemical products that create bad waste that pollute air, water and soil. Today's fashion industry wants to earn a lot of money and

so it creates a rhythm of new collections all year through. In Amsterdam, we are happy when we can buy nice clothes for little money. We do not realize how these clothes are made at the expense of children, people, and the planet as a whole.



Whether you are in Beijing, Amsterdam, Delhi or Mexico City, people look very similar and follow the same fashion, wearing jeans and similar coloured shirts. In these same clothes, which all people seem to like, you can find traces of the patterns and the colours of the textile crafts. For example,

the colour of jeans is like the indigo from the old days. After a year or so, in all these cities, we throw our clothes away, and big mountains of thrown-away clothes rise to the horizon and pollute the environment again.

Please remember that there are good ways to make clothes and bad ways. You and I, and all of

us, can choose more carefully what we buy and where we buy it. You can decide to buy unique clothes from the craftspeople who make beautiful fabrics with their hands. Maybe you can even become one of the craftspeople and help to make a good future for our world.